

Lesson 3 24 May, 2020

“The Things Which Are Not Seen”

Lesson Scope: 2 Corinthians 4:7 through 5: 16

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

In the text of the previous lesson, Paul discussed the glorious Gospel, and concluded with how the Gospel is the light shining into the heart of the believer. Paul compares Christians to earthen vessels, which are weak and unable to fill themselves, yet are filled by God with this price-less treasure. This leads to the thought of the distress and weakness that the Christian faces as a frail and fallible man who continues to live in, but not after, the flesh while struggling to reach the goal of a glorious eternity.

This journey is very challenging. It is a spiritual battle in which Satan and the world assault this earthen vessel and cause the Gospel messenger much distress. To aid the believer, divine power and love fill him with a glorious hope that preserves him in trial, presses his spirit to witness, and prepares him for his Lord’s presence. The goal is the unseen but yet believed-in reward of a renewed, unfailing body and being with God in the perfect place prepared by God for the believer.

The power of the Gospel in the believer’s life dispels unbelief and reveals eternal realities. The believer now has the assurance “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Paul’s thoughts lead from the glorious Gospel, to the heart that accepts it, to the body that contains it, to the frailness of that body, to the difficulties the body endures in the Christian life, to the power of God to enable the Christian, to the desire for the eternal, heavenly body and being present with God. Each thought has its own further considerations. For example, the thought of change from the earthly body to the heavenly body brings the thought of the account man will give of the things done in his earthly body. This also introduces the urgency of persuading others to accept the Gospel. Throughout the lesson text, Paul’s burden for the work of the kingdom of God and the salvation of souls

shines through. His ultimate desire was to be with the Lord. Until this desire could be realized, Paul needed to continue to live and labour so that he would receive the reward he desired.

This lesson is a reminder that this life is a preparation for the life that is to come.

Lesson Aim: To consider how the Christian's eternal vision directs his life.

Theme Verses: [Colossians 3:1-2](#). If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

Lesson Text

Fervent Service

[2 Corinthians 4:7-10](#)

⁷ (KJV) But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. ⁸ *We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

[2 Corinthians 4:14-18](#)

¹⁴ (KJV) Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present *us* with you. ¹⁵ For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. ¹⁶ For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; ¹⁸ While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

Heavenly Expectation

[2 Corinthians 5:1-5](#)

¹ (KJV) For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eter-

nal in the heavens. ² For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: ³ If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. ⁴ For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. ⁵ Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:8-10

⁸ (KJV) We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. ⁹ Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.

Earthly Affliction

2 Corinthians 5:11-16

¹¹ (KJV) Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. ¹² For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to *answer* them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. ¹³ For whether we be beside ourselves, *it is* to God: or whether we be sober, *it is* for your cause. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: ¹⁵ And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. ¹⁶ Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more.

Questions for Study

Earthly Affliction

1. Why are Christians, who are but frail mortals, not overcome by difficulties brought on by the unseen spirit world? (Also Ephesians 6:12.)
2. In what ways does the Christian bear the marks of Jesus' death?
3. How can the Christian demonstrate the life of Christ?
4. While living in our earthly bodies in this temporal world how can we increase our consciousness of the spiritual and eternal?

Heavenly Expectation

5. What blessings do we anticipate in our eternal bodies?
6. For what things will we need to give account at the judgment seat of Christ?

Fervent Service

7. What does the love of Christ constrain us to do?
8. What opportunities do we have to persuade others of the truth?

Analysing the Passage

This treasure (4:7) refers to the Gospel, which is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God that has shined into the heart of each believer.

Earthen vessels (4:7) are pottery containers that aptly illustrate the weak human body that contains the heart which has this treasure in it. A pottery container cannot fill itself, is of little value, and is easily broken, yet it can contain a very valuable material. Likewise, our bodies are earthly, fragile, defenceless, and empty in themselves. By the excellency of God's power (4:7), both the vessel and the priceless treasure are sustained in tribulation, bringing great honour and glory to His name.

“Our earthly house of this tabernacle” (5:1) is our present physical, mortal, temporary body. “Our house which is from heaven” (5:2) is our glorified, eternal, heavenly body. Our desire to be with God makes us willing to give up this body and life (“willing rather to be absent from the body”) (5:8). Leaving this life is not reason for fear, but rather for anticipation, as it is exchanging mortality for life.

We “know . . . no man after the flesh” in that we no longer focus on things from the earthly, human point of view. We see all things from a spiritual, eternal perspective. We see lost humanity as spiritually dead souls in need of the Gospel. We see believers as spiritually alive new creatures in Christ. We see people as souls with eternal destinies.

Principles and Applications

Earthly Affliction

1. The Christian endures difficulty, conflict, and death that he may also experience life (4:8-10). The words describing the Christian as troubled, perplexed, persecuted, and cast down describe the intense difficulties the Christian faces. Some of these difficulties result specifically from

identity with Christ. Jesus said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). Satan, the world, and the fallen nature war against the Christian. But eternal life awaits the overcomer.

2. Our lives are directed by the steadfast faith that bodily death will usher us into eternal life (4:13-14). Abraham through faith “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). Paul had “a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Philippians 1:23). Through steadfast faith, we, like them, can face physical death with a calmness and a desire to be with God. This same steadfast faith inspires us to serve God faithfully in order to realize that reward. Paul also said, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Whether in life or in death, his faith led him to serve God wherever God called him, and through any tribulation he was called to face.

3. The Christian endeavours to use this life to serve others for their eternal good (4:15). We need to be willing to be spent for the eternal good of others. We can pray for the lost, visit the sick, minister to those in prison, teach our children, sacrifice for our Christian schools, and support publishing and outreach efforts.

4. The eternal puts the difficulties of this life into proper perspective (4:16-17). Men may mock or condemn us, but if Jesus says, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant,” what does it matter? Men may take away our earthly possessions or treat us dishonestly in business because we are non-resistant, but when we sit down with Jesus in His throne, what will that matter? We may feel as if our earthly body and life is wasting away as a result of the afflictions we face. These afflictions, though they may feel heavy now, are light both in that they are comparatively short and in that they are of little consequence when compared to eternity.

5. Eternal vision focuses on the unseen and permanent rather than on the visible and temporary (4:18). How can we look at things that cannot be seen? Our physical eyes see the things of this earth and cannot see things that are spiritual and eternal. It takes little effort to focus on the things we can see with our eyes, but those things are fleeting and of little value. Our focus, our aim, and our hope must be on things which only our spiritual eyes can see through faith.

Heavenly Expectation

6. The Christian lives with the continual desire for the promised full redemption (5:1 -2, 4). We experienced redemption in a spiritual sense when we received Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour. However, we continue to live in this fallen world and in this earthly body, which will both be dissolved. In this earthly body, we groan and are burdened, in that we experience the effects of the Fall: physical separation from God, pain, sickness, discouragement, trials, fatigue, and the reality of death. We continue to long for the time of full redemption when we will receive our resurrected body in its perfection and the perfect abode of heaven, both of which are eternal.

7. Eternal vision fosters a strong sense of accountability (5:9-10).

Through eternal vision, we see the time when we will be called to give account of the deeds done in our earthly life. This realization of our personal accountability leads us to make it our aim to live to please God. We will give account for our deeds, our words, our efforts to warn the wicked and spread the Gospel, our use of our abilities and resources, and our influence on others. When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, will we be found well-pleasing before Him?

Fervent Service

8. The knowledge of impending judgment compels us to preach the Gospel to all men (5:11). If we were to see a person perishing physically, we would with all available resources and extreme urgency endeavour to save him. When we see individuals who are perishing spiritually and are living apart from God, we should also reach out to them with the saving Gospel with urgency, fervency, and grave concern (see Jude 23). We often have opportunities to reach out to our neighbours, our banker, our mechanic, our electrician, the store clerk, and many others. Why do we so often put this off when we know so many around us who are not ready to meet Christ? How can we hesitate, when we know opportunity is limited, time is running out, and judgment is sure?

9. We are constrained to live for Christ, who gave Himself for our salvation (5:14-15). Jesus, the only sinless man, the only one who did not deserve to die, came and died for us. We can in no way repay the debt we owe Christ for dying for us who were spiritually dead. Jesus' death provided spiritual life for us, not so that we would live for ourselves,

but so that we would live for Christ. All that we do, we must do to the glory of God.

Important Teachings

1. The Christian endures difficulty, conflict, and death that he may also experience life (4:8-10).
2. Our lives are directed by the steadfast faith that bodily death will usher us into eternal life (4:13-14).
3. The Christian endeavours to use this life to serve others for their eternal good (4:15).
4. The eternal puts the difficulties of this life into proper perspective (4:16-17).
5. Eternal vision focuses on the unseen and permanent rather than on the visible and temporary (4:18).
6. The Christian lives with the continual desire for the promised full redemption (5:1-2, 4).
7. Eternal vision fosters a strong sense of accountability (5:9-10).
8. The knowledge of impending judgment compels us to preach the Gospel to all mankind (5:11).
9. We are constrained to live for Christ, who gave Himself for our salvation (5:14-15).

Answers to Questions

1. Why are Christians, who are but frail mortals, not overcome by difficulties brought on by the unseen spirit world? (Also see Ephesians 6:12.)

The Christian can stand and fight in the power and armour of God. The Christian has an inward spiritual strength available through the work of Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Christian's inward man is renewed each day with strength and inspiration from God.

The Christian's commitment to sacrifice all for God allows him to be resigned and at peace inwardly despite reverses and loss in this world, even being joyful in times of loss (see Hebrews 10:34). The Christian's "spirit of faith" helps him to keep his eyes on the eternal goal and the promises of God.

2. In what ways does the Christian bear the marks of Jesus' death?

Often, it is not visible marks on the body of the believer for persecution endured, although it could be. The Christian takes up the cross and fol-

lows Jesus (Matthew 16:24). We are willing to suffer reproach, mockery, loss, persecution, and physical death for the name of Christ (1 Timothy 4:10). We may be the despised and rejected, bearing the reproach of Christ and the cross (Hebrews 13:12-13). The Christian life involves constantly dying to self and remaining separate from the world even when it draws the ire of the world and when we stand alone.

3. How can the Christian demonstrate the life of Christ?

The Christian has the treasure of the Gospel in him, so his life should show the power and light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian has the spirit of faith that should be expressed in his words and actions. We should be serving others with true compassion and love for their eternal good as Christ did. Our lives need to be changed from serving the flesh to living a life of holiness. The Christian demonstrates the life of Christ through non-resistance when mistreated and endurance in suffering. We should be laying up treasure in heaven and working for the kingdom of God.

4. While living in our earthly bodies in this temporal world, how can we increase our consciousness of the spiritual and eternal?

We should be putting our efforts into laying up treasure in heaven. Our attention will be where our treasure is. Our conversations should often be on the spiritual and heavenly things. Our concern for others should be a spiritual concern. Our greatest desire should be to be right with God and finally to be with God. We need to always remember that all things of this world will dissolve.

5. What blessings do we anticipate in our eternal bodies?

We will no longer groan and be burdened under the curse of the Fall. We will have perfect bodies in which we will not experience sickness or death. We will not face trials and tribulations or be tempted by Satan. We will be present with God. We will be in a perfect place, praising and worshiping God without the cares of earthly needs pressing for our attention.

6. For what things will we need to give account at the judgment seat of Christ?

We will give account for the deeds we have done and the words we have spoken. We will give account for how we have used the resources God has given to us. We will give account for whether we have wor-

shipped, praised, and thanked God. We will give account for our use of opportunities to warn the wicked and our efforts to spread the Gospel. We will give account for how we have used our abilities, gifts, and strengths. We will give account of our influence on others.

7. What does the love of Christ constrain us to do?

The love and work of Christ on our behalf constrain us to not live for ourselves, but to live for Christ who died for us. We are constrained to be dead to the old man and sinful pleasure, and commit ourselves to serving the kingdom of God. Since Christ died for all, and all are dead in sin without Christ, we are constrained to preach the Gospel where we have opportunity to do so. Christ's love for us constrains us to love every person and to endeavour to serve them.

8. What opportunities do we have to persuade others of the truth?

When we have the opportunity to assist an individual in an earthly need, such as helping him change a flat tire along the road, we have an opportunity to tell of the love of God. When someone uses bad language or tells a dirty story, we can reprimand him and remind him that God hears everything we say. When someone asks us of our practices, we should quickly point him to the Gospel message and give a testimony as to what God has done for us. When someone comments on the good behaviour of our children, we should take the opportunity to tell him we are endeavouring to live by the Bible.

Summarizing the Lesson

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In ev'ry change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heav'nly Friend
Through tho' my ways leads to a joyful end.

Research Guide

1. Starting with Ephesians 6:12, search for verses on the Christian's battle against unseen forces and the battle of the spirit world.
2. Starting with Matthew 6:19-20, search for verses that speak of laying up treasure in heaven.
3. Search for verses that speak of our giving account before the judgement seat of Christ.